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Problems With Your Hospital Care? Speak Up!

BY EMILY BAZAR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

My dad was in excruciating pain over Labor Day weekend, so my mom rushed him to the emergency room of a renowned university hospital.

Doctors determined that he needed surgery that night, and luckily I was able to fly in and see him before he was wheeled away. "Take care of your mom if anything happens to me," he said as my mom and I wept.

Thankfully, my dad made it through. But he had to spend 11 days recovering in the hospital, a place he now equates with prison.

One night, he suffered for five hours, desperately calling for help after his pain meds had run out. A nurse's aide stationed in his room had fallen asleep.

"I called on the intercom so many times, and nobody showed up," he recounts.

That was just one of the many failures in care that we encountered during my dad's stay. Others included inconsistent nursing quality, waiting all day for doctors to respond to pages, insensitive communication of bad news, trying in vain to reduce noise levels so my dad could sleep, and so much more.

My job is to give you advice on health care and insurance issues. My mom is a registered nurse. Yet we both felt frustrated that we couldn't make things better for my dad.

Unfortunately, this happens to a lot of people. "Everything you hear these days is about patient-centered care, this and that," says Terry Bay, who owns a Casper, Wyo.-based business that provides advocacy services to older patients. But "we don't live in a patient-centered health care environment."

Today I'm going to offer advice for you in case you or a loved one lands in a hospital.

There are state and federal laws that cover, among other things, your rights to privacy, nondiscrimination, language interpretation and visitation, says Lois Richardson, vice president and legal counsel of the California Hospital Association. But beyond legal protections, there are people you can talk to and steps you can take to improve your situation if you feel you're not getting the care you deserve. And patients' opinions do count.

"All hospitals increasingly are being scored and paid based on patient and family satisfaction scores," says Rebecca Kirch, an executive vice president with the National Patient Advocate Foundation. "There is power in the people."

That power starts with a few simple things. First, make sure a spouse, child, family member or friend — anyone concerned for your well-being — can spend time with you in the hospital and be your

advocate. You cannot do it by yourself while you're in pain, medicated and not thinking clearly.

"It's having someone else in your court, someone who can check in and make sure your questions are being answered," says Dr. Rebecca Sudore, a geriatrician and palliative care physician at the University of California-San Francisco.

Before you or your advocate speaks to your nurse or doctor, write down your questions. Keep track of your glasses, hearing aids and dentures — the personal belongings that most often go missing in hospitals, Sudore says.

"How can someone speak up for themselves if they can't see someone? Or can't hear?" she asks.

When the time comes to ask questions — or express frustration — don't be afraid to speak up. You have every right, even though it can feel intimidating to question your doctors or complain about your nurses.

"You can say, 'No, I don't want to go for that test. I want to speak to my daughter first,'" Bay says.

If you're getting jostled out of sleep for a blood draw or blood pressure check in the middle of the night, ask your doctor the next day if it's really necessary. Often, it can wait till early morning, says Julianne Morath, president and CEO of the Hospital Quality Institute.

"It's up to us to put our own humanity back into decisions," Sudore says.

But here's where speaking up can get thorny. Let's say you don't feel you're getting adequate care or you're unhappy with how you're being treated. You can start with your nurse, but if that's uncomfortable — perhaps because that nurse is the source of the problem — approach the charge nurse, who manages the staff in your unit.

You can also ask to talk to a hospital-based social worker, who can intercede or help you figure out who to talk to, Kirch says.

If that doesn't help, take your complaints to the next level. Every hospital that participates in the Medicare program — which is most — must have an ombudsman or patient rights advocate, Richardson says. My mom and I eventually complained to the patient rights advocate. It helped, and we wish we had done it sooner. If you can't go to the patient rights advocate yourself, "you can call them or ask your nurse to call them and have them come up to your room," Richardson says. Hospitals must acknowledge patient complaints immediately, she says, and must respond in writing once they are resolved.

And don't forget that your caregivers are human too, Morath advises. "They get tired, they get stressed," she said.

Is a food supplement necessary?

BY DEE STRAUSS
GREEN HOUSE LIVING FOR SHERIDAN

SHERIDAN — The camera zooms in on an attractive female senior watering her flowers; the screen fades to a fit elderly gentleman getting ready to throw a bowling ball; finally, it pans the beach where a smiling grandmother watches her grandchildren play.

"The roles you play in life are part of what make you," explains the male voiceover, "and you're not going to let anything keep you sidelined. That's why you drink Ensure with nutritious calories, 9 grams of protein and 26 vitamins and minerals giving you the strength and energy to get back to doing what you love."

Anyone watching television is inundated with commercials promoting the health benefits of Ensure, Boost, Glucerna and other nutritional supplements, but who really needs a nutritional supplement?

Nutritional supplements range from 150 to 350 calories and are meant to be a snack or meal supplement, according to Megan Sexton, clinical registered dietitian at Sheridan Memorial Hospital and the consulting dietitian for Green House Living for Sheridan. They are not meant to be the sole source of nutrition.

Sexton said there are two problems with supplements. One, people need to encourage real food consumption because of the micronutrients and macronutrients. Supplements can't mimic those things in digestion as well as nature can. Two, Sexton said nutritional supplements are still processed food much like Doritos or Oreos.

Typically, the main ingredient in supplements is high fructose corn syrup, which Sexton said is used to mask the unpleasant protein flavor.

"That really bothers me," she said. "These drinks also

contain trans fats, which research pretty definitively indicates is not good for you."

Sexton explained that as people age, appetite decreases and people lose muscle mass. Older adults can lose muscle mass and weight quickly with strokes, Parkinson's Disease and other physiological changes that make swallowing difficult.

Sexton added that older adults also can lose their sense of taste from medications or chemotherapy treatment. Those with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or asthma — who are mouth breathers — can also lose their sense of taste.

At Green House Living, Sexton recommends first using real food but mechanically altering it by cutting it into small pieces, using a slow cooker to make the food tender or adding gravy or sauces so the food is not dry. She also suggests different cuts of meat or different protein sources such as fish or legumes.

"Really, at any age we should work with real food and try different texture differences and flavor differences first," she said.

If you don't have success with real food, Sexton suggested you consider making your own blended smoothie by starting with ½ cup or one piece of fruit, one to two cups of leafy greens such as spinach or kale, liquid (milk or a nut milk product preferably fortified

with vitamin D, or water) and one scoop (25 grams) of protein powder you can buy at a health food store (look for whey, pea, soy or hemp protein).

"We recently made a great smoothie with avocado," said Sirena Cooley, dietary manager for Green House Living.

You could also add other healthy fats such as flaxseed oil or flax seeds.

In addition to making your own smoothie, Sexton recommended adding unflavored protein powder to anything hot such as sauces you make, soup or even a milkshake.

But while Sexton believes that supplements are marketed more than they should be, she acknowledged that there is sometimes a demographic that needs them. There are barriers to eating healthy — for example, you might live alone or suffer from fatigue.

Prior to implementing a supplement, Sexton recommended you check with a registered dietitian or your physician. The ingredients in supplements can sometimes interfere with medications. Diabetics need a supplement not loaded with sugar.

"If you are not losing weight or strength — strength to do your daily activities, you are probably not lacking calories or protein," Sexton said.

Therefore, you probably don't need a commercial nutritional supplement.



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Salad Bar Available
Mondays - Fridays

No Salad Bar on
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*entrée only offered for Home Delivered Meals

ENTRÉE CHOICE* or SOUP/SALAD

Tue- Oven Fried Chicken	1:00 p.m.
Wed- Beef Pepper Steak	1:00 p.m.
Thu- Country Ribs	5:30 p.m.
Fri- Beef Pot Roast	12:30 p.m.
Sat- Ham Penne Skillet	12:30 - 3:30 p.m.
Sun- Hot Turkey Sandwich	
Mon- Sesame Meatballs	

UPCOMING SPECIAL EVENTS

Tue- Crafts	1:00 p.m.	Art Studio	
Wed- DEEP	1:00 p.m.	Art Studio	
Thurs - Creaky Yoga	5:30 p.m.	Community Room	
Fri - Bridge	12:30 p.m.	Community Room	
Sat- Greeting Card Workshop	12:30 - 3:30 p.m.	Art Studio	
Sun- Billiards	Open Play	9:00 a.m.	Billiards Room

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Loan Closet, Outreach, and Administration Services, 672-2240. Mondays - Fridays.

Help at Home Services, 675-1978. 232 North Brooks: Mondays - Fridays.

Day Break Adult Care Services, 674-4968. 241 Smith Street: Mondays - Fridays.

SENIOR HAPPENINGS

FROM STAFF REPORTS

- Shopping Sheridan Days for Tongue River Valley residents are available every first and third Thursday of each month through The Hub on Smith and include trips to Albertson's or to Walmart. We can shop for you, with you or leave you on your own. Call ahead to reserve your spot at 655-9419, Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The shopping bus will leave Dayton at 12:30 p.m., pick up riders in Rancho at 12:45 p.m. and return to Rancho at 3:45 p.m., and to Dayton at 4 p.m. The cost is \$8 for a round-trip ride.
- Learn about the Sheridan County Fulmer Public

- Library with Judy Armstrong on Nov. 29 from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the lobby of The Hub on Smith, located at 211 Smith St.
- On Tuesday, Dec. 6, learn about healthy holiday recipes with Georgia Boley as part of the "When I'm 64...or more" lecture series. The event will take place from 5:30-7 p.m. in the café at The Hub on Smith.
- The SheridanAires will present a winter concert Dec. 7 at 1:30 p.m. and Dec. 8 with a dinner beginning at 6 p.m. with a suggested contribution of \$10 per person. Those interested in attending may prepay at the front desk of The Hub on Smith. Organizers ask attendees to RSVP for dinner only. The show will begin at 7 p.m.